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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000495

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP,
INR/B;

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SUBJECT: YOUNG SAUDI WOMEN SPEAK: THEIR VIEW OF THE FUTURE

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. In a discussion with Saudi college-aged women, EconOff learned about some of the issues confronting young females in Jeddah, what concerns they have for the future, and their thoughts about their portrayal in the West.

As Saudi society undergoes numerous changes, young Saudi women are excited and encouraged by the opportunities that are increasingly available to them and hope to become more active in all aspects of Saudi society. They also have strong opinions about how the Muslim image is allegedly being distorted by the media and are frustrated by having to often refute negative stereotypes of Saudi Arabia. End Summary.

2.(U) On July 18 EconOff met with a group of young women from Dar al-Hekma college and King Abdul Aziz University. Some of the ladies were recent college graduates and the others were entering their junior year. They completed their studies in a variety of majors including Management Information Systems, English, and Interior Design.

ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

13. (C) The young women were optimistic about finding employment after graduation from college. Two of the ladies had part-time jobs while in school and said that they are trying to get as much work experience as possible in order to get a better job when they graduate. They said that their parents were generally supportive of their career goals as long as they did not have to travel with their work, which would not be acceptable by cultural standards. One young lady currently works for a youth magazine and the others plan to open a business together. They claim that it is now easier for women to work and not neglect their families because the culture is more accepting of women working and some employers are making it even easy by providing on the job daycare. They feel that because society is progressing they have more options and as a result have many interests that they want to pursue.

14. (C) Government employment is still preferred by young Saudis, however, the ladies said that in their circles more students are pursuing fields of study so they can work in the private sector. Jobs in the banking sector and graphic design are most popular. Overall, they are very interested in business and want to know more about Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). They are curious about how Saudi Arabia can benefit from the WTO and

what is going to change in the country as a result of accession. On the stock market, they said that many people lost a lot of money because of the decline but they blamed companies for a lack of transparency and said that the very rich investors "manipulated the market at the expense of the people."

15. (C) Recognizing their status as middle class, the young women aspire to one day be able to help all Saudi women. They said they would open community centers to help people who need access to educational materials such as computers and provide activities for the youth to participate in. They view the lack of educational opportunities and training as one of the major problems Saudi women face today.

NOT IN MY NAME

16. (C) Another major concern of these young women is that they feel the Western world is ignorant about what Saudi Arabia is really like. They blame the Western media for distorting the West's view of Saudi Arabia and Islam. They say that the bad side of Saudi Arabia is always displayed but the media rarely shows the improvements that are occurring in the Kingdom. They feel that media is biased against Arabs.

7.(C) The ladies also feel that extremists are damaging the world's view of Islam; they repeatedly told EconOff that: "this is not Islam." When asked what could be done to improve the situation, the young ladies said that both sides need to learn more about each other in order to understand the differences between them. They feel that as more people knew

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more about Islam, they will recognize how deviant the extremists are from the true message of Islam.
Gfoeller